



March 9, 2006

The Honorable Therese Murray
Chair, Senate Ways and Means Committee
State House - Room 212
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Robert A. DeLeo
Chair, House Ways and Means Committee
State House - Room 243
Boston, MA 02133

RE: Department of Conservation and Recreation FY07 Budget

Dear Senator Murray and Representative DeLeo:

I am writing you in my capacity as Chairman of the Department of Conservation and Recreation's (DCR) Stewardship Council. The legislature established the Stewardship Council to review and adopt management plans, to develop an oversight strategy for park management plans, capital planning and policy development and to review and approve the DCR budget, among other duties. On December 9, 2005 the Stewardship Council approved and commented on DCR's proposed FY07 budget in a letter to Environmental Affairs Secretary Pritchard. (Attached) We have subsequently reviewed the DCR line-items filed as a part of House 2 and have a number of comments and questions we hope the House and Senate will consider as they develop the Commonwealth's FY07 State Budget.

DCR FY07 Budget Submission

On December 9th, the Stewardship Council recommended that the FY07 budget proposed by the Commissioner of DCR to the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs should be built on the base of the approved FY06 Spending Plan, including the hiring of critical vacancies and additional resources to cover unbudgeted and unforeseen.FY06 energy expenses.

Using this as a base for an FY07 budget, the Stewardship council recommended adding incremental allocations to fund the following new activities:

-- Resource Management Planning Capacity;

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Governor

Kerry Healey
Lt. Governor

Stephen R. Pritchard, Secretary
Executive Office of Environmental Affairs

Stephen H. Burrington, Commissioner
Department of Conservation & Recreation

- Storm Water Compliance capacity to meet milestones and requirements as set forth in DCR's August 10, 2005 letter to US EPA Region 1;
- Regulation of the 3,000 dams for which DCR is responsible and to maintain, repair or remove dams owned and managed by DCR;
- Management and stewardship responsibilities for new assets transferred to the agency (including 166 acres of parkland in the Charles River Basin in Boston and Cambridge and on Spectacle Island created from the completion of the Central Artery/Tunnel project);
- An economical, predictable and sustainable replacement program for non-capital vehicles and other equipment; and
- Increases in DCR's energy expenditures.

House 2 Provisions for DCR

Generally, the DCR accounts submitted in House 2 contain language which either mention or incorporate the priorities identified by the Stewardship Council (above) in its December 9, 2005 letter. However, it is not at all clear that incremental funding for direct expenses or for additional staff needed for these new activities has been included in House 2. For example, DCR's FY06 spending authorization totaled \$82.677 million, but House 2's total FY07 budget for DCR sums to \$84.254 million. The FY06 to FY07 increase of less than \$2 million is far less than the incremental investment needed to implement the priorities highlighted by the Stewardship Council.

This prompts the overarching question and observation that the Stewardship Council asks the legislature to consider. If the legislature accepts the Council's opinion that the current DCR FY06 budget and spending plan is at best a "bare bones" level of funding, and if the Stewardship Council's incremental priorities included in House 2 amount to more than \$5 million, how is it possible that the increase from FY06 levels adopted by the legislature to the FY07 levels proposed in House 2 is less than \$2 million? The Stewardship Council is concerned that the agency is being asked to take on these essential new priorities with little if any incremental funding and possibly no additional staff. It is hard for the Council to imagine how we can aspire to increasing the effectiveness of the DCR while building and maintaining a "world class" park system if, at the same time, we reduce the funding and staff available to the agency.

Following are some comments on specific accounts:

Account 28000200 - Stormwater Management

The Council is pleased House 2 includes \$1.5 million to permit the agency to comply with its stormwater management. We hope the legislature retains this level of funding.

Accounts 28000500 & 28000600 - Beach & Pool Preservation

The legislature incorporated these line items in FY06 and the Council is pleased both by their inclusion as new accounts and by the amounts budgeted in each. We are aware that DCR has had to cut back its operating dates for both pools and beaches in recent years due to budget cutbacks. We suspect the amounts in House 2 contemplate continued operation with this shorter schedule and additional funding should be budgeted if the legislature wants to extend the schedule for both types of facilities.

Account 28000700 - Office of Dam Safety

The Stewardship Council is pleased that DCR accounts include this new line item but is very concerned with the small (\$0.5 million) level of funding proposed for the account. DCR is responsible for regulating 3,000 dams across the Commonwealth. \$0.5 million is not sufficient for DCR to inspect repair and maintain the dams under its jurisdiction. In light of the crisis experienced by the City of Taunton this past fall, we recommend the legislature consider significantly increasing this account in order to permit the agency to hire staff and perform its regulatory responsibilities. We believe \$2.5 million would be a more realistic amount.

Account 28100100 - State Parks and Recreation

We understand that an additional \$0.75 million and \$0.79 million were included in this account for new equipment purchases and Resource Management Planning capacity, respectively. The Council is very pleased to see both these items and their respective amounts in the account. However, it is not clear whether the \$1.9 million increase in the account from FY06 to House 2 is sufficient to accommodate these new activities and general operating increases, including pay increases. The Council also asks the legislature to ensure that the budget allows the agency to hire new staff in order to process management plans for all facilities within the next three years.

Account 28200100 - Urban Parks and Recreation

We understand that \$1.37 million was removed from this account and transferred to a new expansion account to cover the maintenance of the new Central Artery/Tunnel Parks and Spectacle Island. We also understand an additional \$0.75 million was included for new equipment purchases. First, it is not clear why the Urban Parks account would be reduced at all when the Urban Parks and Recreation funding already is “bare bones”, and DCR’s obligations to maintain the Central Artery/Tunnel Parks and Spectacle Island is new. At the very least this Urban Park account should be increased \$0.75 million above the FY06 level of \$23.609 million to accommodate the new equipment purchasing program.

Account 28200300 - Central Artery/Tunnel Parks and Spectacle Island

As indicated above, this account should be funded at its proposed level and in a manner that permits DCR to hire the necessary staff to carry out this work. The amount budgeted in this account should not be deducted from the Urban Parks and Recreation account. Rather, it should be an incremental addition to DCR's budget over FY06 levels.

While the Stewardship Council has neither the time nor expertise to review DCR's budget in great detail, we hope our comments and concerns will provide the legislature with a reference for making changes to DCR's budget. We have an ambitious agenda and purpose - turning our state and urban park system into world class facilities. To do so we have to ensure funding and staff is available at DCR to do the job. We hope our December 9, 2005 letter and the comments above will help the legislature improve on the DCR budget submitted with House 2.

I look forward to meeting with you soon.

Sincerely,

Richard R. Cross
Chairman

Attachment

cc: Senate President Travaglini
House Speaker DiMasi
Stephen Burrington, Commissioner, DCR
DCR Stewardship Council